Late Calving Cows: Lost Weight, Lost Dollars

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ìGetting behind the eightballî is an old idiom implying one is in a difficult position and time is not in oneís favor. In the beef industry, ìgetting behind the eightballî is common, especially when trying to manage reproduction.

The processes of reproduction never stop. The normal system keeps on going by starting, maintaining or stopping reproductive cycles. Even when reproduction seems at a standstill, a multitude of events are taking place throughout the body.

Pregnancy testing beef cows is a case in point. Obviously, one will not stay behind the eightball forever because the cows will eventually calve, assuring the owner the cow was pregnant. Otherwise, the pasture gate swings open in the spring and the cow leaves without a calf at side, assuring the owner the cow was open.

Economically, there are many recommendations to help producers avoid feeding open cows throughout the winter, which means more feed for pregnant cows. Some minor arguments are made to justify keeping open cows; however, the majority opinion would be to move open cows into an alternative marketing program as soon as possible.

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, the cows are generally evaluated for pregnancy at about 70 days after bull turn-out or artificial insemination breeding. At this time, calves conceived during the first cycle are roughly 50 to 70 days old and easy to measure by ultrasound. The common measurement would be a cranial measurement, which is the distance across the calfís head.

At the same time, calves conceived in the second cycle, about 30 to 50 days old, can be measured. The measurement of choice is body length, which is a measurement from the tail to the calfís head. This measurement is straightforward and fairly easy to take.

Using the ultrasound measurements, the cow herd can be divided into three groups: early calving, middle calving and late calving/open cows. An easy expression would be those predicted to calve in the first 21 days of the calving season, then those predicted to calve in the next 21 day period, and finally those that calve late.

CHAPS data suggests producers in the northern region have 58 percent of the mature cows calve in the first 21 days, 85 percent calve within the first 42 days and 15 percent calve late.

Earlier, economics was put on as a condition to pregnancy check cows. If all the cows are managed alike, as if they were all pregnant and going to calve at the start of the calving season, significant inputs are put into cows that are not ready to calve. The bottom line: only 58 percent of the cows did what management expected.

Cows calving in the second 21-day period will come up short on calf weight by almost 50 pounds, assuming the typical average daily gain for CHAPS calves is in excess of 2.3 pounds per day. For cows calving in the third 21-day period of the calving season, calving weight will come up short by approximately 100 pounds. If one has 100 cows, 27 calves would be in the second cycle, losing a total of 1,350 pounds and 15 calves would be assumed to have been born in the third cycle, losing a total of 1,500 pounds.

That means for 100 cows, 2,850 pounds of calf do not arrive on time. Costs increase if you manage cows as if they were going to calve during the first cycle. With calves at $1.10 per pound, there is more than $3,000 of wish money, which is money no one can spend. It pays to sort cows.

So why are we behind the eightball? Well, the center didnít get the early pregnancy checking done this year, so the cows arenít sorted. But there is still hope if we age the calves by eyeball size. What do you think? More next time.

May you find all your USAIP ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at *www.BeefTalk.com*. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to *www.CHAPS2000.com* on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0224.

Current Genetic Value (EPDs) of Bull M389
Dickinson Research Extension Center

	M389	Contemporary Group EPD Averages
Calv. ease direct (%)	-6.1	-0.4
Birth weight	+8.3	3.8
Weaning weight	+52	35
Yearling weight	+97	59
Milk	+15	13
Milk and growth	+41	31
Calv. ease mat. (%)	-4.9	0.4
Scrotal circ.	+0.5	0.6
Fat	-0.01	0.00
Rib eye area	-0.01	0.05
IMF %	+0.07	0.00

EPD values from the American Hereford Association
Web site www.hereford.org